For a Sprained Ankle, Physical Therapy No Better Than Self Care

**By NICHOLAS BAKALAR**NOV. 16, 2016

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Physical therapy for a sprained ankle may be no more effective than self-treatment at home, a randomized trial reports.

Canadian researchers randomly assigned 503 patients ages 16 to 79 to one of two groups. The first received up to seven sessions of supervised physical therapy, with isometric resistance exercises, strength training, stretching and other guided techniques to restore pain-free stability. The second was sent home with instructions for the usual care — a one-page sheet listing information about keeping the ankle elevated, applying compression and ice, and gradually increasing movement and weight bearing.

The [study, in the BMJ](http://www.bmj.com/content/355/bmj.i5984), used a questionnaire that assesses quality of life, pain, symptoms and function in daily activities and sports. It found no clinically significant differences between the two groups at one, three or six months after the injury.

The senior author, Brenda Brouwer, a professor in the school of rehabilitation at Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario, said that the results do not mean that physical therapy is useless for sprained ankles.

“It’s still a choice,” she said. “If you want to manage it yourself, that’s fine. But I would urge people to at least seek advice from a physical therapist to learn what limitations they might need to impose on themselves.”